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# British fooled by Cok

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George Washington: gentleman rebel commander; manipulator of men and master of deception. Henry Clinton: defender of the British crown, duped and defeated strategist.

The timeless wartime tactics of espionage and deception lend an unconventional interpretation to what stirred military planners as the American colonies lunged for victory in the summer and fall of 1781.

Edward F. Sayle, historical curator of intelligence for the Central Intelligence Agency near Washington, believes Washington's efforts to hide American army intentions from the British led to Clinton being caught off guard and to Gen. Charles Cornwallis being caught virtually undefended at Yorktown in October 200 years ago.

Operating in their home territory, Americans successfully completed many intelligence operations against the British, Sayle says. The Redcoats, however, seemed unable to keep secrets as well or to deceive the Americans as often.

The Allied victory at Yorktown is often regarded as a result of the fortuitous arrival of Comte de Grasse's French fleet in the Chesapeake Bay in late summer 1781.

Until then, Washington and his French allies, Marquis de Lafayette and Comte de Rochambeau, considered New York the likely site for confrontation with the British led by Clinton.

Sayle spells out his interpretation (independently of his CIA role) in "Chronology of a Deception," part of a book he is writing about the role of intelligence during the struggle for independence.

The passage of time and the fading of memories, Sayle notes, have obscured much of the planning that was developed behind canvas tent flaps and in poorly lit parlors.

As spring and summer passed in 1781, Washington and Rochambeau held their troops in the area of New York, giving the appearance of preparing for a battle with Clinton. An out-matched Lafayette was watching Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Washington himself, Sayle writes, hinted at the grand deception he had engineered before the Yorktown campaign when he wrote in the Massachusetts Columbian Sentinel of July 31, 1788:

"It was determined by me, nearly twelve months before (Cornwallis' surrender) ... to give out ... that New York was the destined

place of attack, for the important purpose of inducing the eastern and middle States to make greater exertions in furnishing specific supplies ... as well as for the interesting purpose of rendering the enemy less prepared elsewhere. ...

"That much trouble was taken ... to misguide and bewilder Sir Henry Clinton ... by fictitious communications ... is certain: Nor were less pains taken to deceive our own army."

Sayle credits Washington with fabricating documents that were allowed to fall into British hands and with having apparent "secrets" discussed where the British could hear them.

Couriers and purported deserters would deliver false information from the Americans, and mail pouches were intercepted and returned to the British with important changes.

In April 1781 Clinton intercepted a mail pouch that Sayle believes contained false information. The courier had protested to Washington that the route he was instructed to follow would result in his capture. Washington replied: "Your duty, Sir, is not to talk, but obey."

When the British read the mail, which left no doubt about American hopes for capturing New York, they were ecstatic: They knew what to plan against.

Clinton began a series of dispatches to Cornwallis in Virginia, requesting additional troops to defend New York.

In May, Washington and Rochambeau formally agreed on New York as their target. However, a British informer reported that Washington intended to take his Continental Army to Virginia, where Cornwallis would be vulnerable.

As Clinton gathered more information about New York during June he sent at least five dispatches to Cornwallis. He wanted more troops and castigated Cornwallis for not properly fortifying Hampton Roads. Cornwallis reluctantly settled at Yorktown and Gloucester.

Sayle regards such dispatches by Clinton as marks of the intelligence he was receiving about the Allied forces. Cornwallis was strongly ordered to secure Yorktown and to send the rest of his troops to Clinton.

Although Washington and Rochambeau were allies, they perhaps kept some information from one another, Sayle thinks. They had

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